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RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 1834
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RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0034
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2371
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 0020
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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA'S HOPES TO OVERCOME URUGUAY'S OBJECTIONS
TO NESTOR KIRCHNER QUASHED AT BRAZIL UNASUR MEETING; CFK
PLANS VISIT TO CUBA

REF: BUENOS AIRES 1595 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) The Argentine press on December 17 focused on the failure by President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner to achieve what had previously been described by Administration sources to the press (and to the Embassy) as her top priority for the December 16-17 regional summit meetings in Brazil: the selection of her husband and former President Nestor Kirchner (NK) as Secretary General for the South American Union of Nations (Unasur). Instead, Uruguayan President Tabare Vazquez remained unbending in his objection, and several nations (including Chile and Paraguay) reportedly rejected the proposal supported by Venezuela and Ecuador to abandon the requirement for consensus among Unasur members in the selection of a Secretary General. The question was put off until April, 2009, with Chilean Foreign Minister Foxley saying that if consensus was not achieved then it would be time to consider another candidate (a sentiment also implicitly expressed by Paraguayan President Lugo, according to the press).

¶2. (U) One local columnist, Mariano Obarrio of La Nacion, reported that the GOA also believed that Colombia and Peru were opposed to NK's candidacy and were supported in this by the United States. Another columnist, Eduardo van der Kooy of "Clarín," opined that the Kirchners' diminished political standing in Argentina had made Vazquez's rejection easier to sustain.

¶3. (SBU) GOA sources and press reports over the weekend of December 13-14 described continuing GOA efforts to secure NK's selection, including a direct dialogue with Uruguay to assuage President Vazquez's objections based on Argentina's continuing failure to end the two-year old roadblock by Argentine protesters of the Gualedaychu to Fray Bentos bridge across the Uruguay river (reftel). Argentine media reported that Uruguayan Foreign Minister Gonzalo Fernandez said Uruguay would quit Unasur if the grouping ignored GOU objections and decided to select Kirchner by some means other than consensus.

¶4. (U) In a related development, Entre Rios Governor Sergio Urribarri, a member of the Kirchners' political coalition, on December 14 was reported in the press to have stated that there was no evidence that the controversial Botnia pulp mill on the Uruguayan side of the Uruguay river was polluting the river and that the protesters who had shut down the international bridge at Gualedaychu therefore had no justification for continuing to block traffic. Gualedaychu mayor Juan Jose Bahillo sharply disputed this statement the

following day, citing a study sponsored by the municipality based on Botnia's public disclosures. Urribarri responded again on the 16th, reiterating that the blockades needed to be lifted.

To Cuba

15. (U) Following a meeting with Hugo Chavez and Raul Castro on the 16th, President Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) announced in Brazil that she will travel to Cuba in early 2009, reportedly in the January 12-15 timeframe. CFK said that "we are going to reaffirm our historic ties of friendship with Cuba."

16. (U) The following day, December 17, CFK called publicly for an end to the U.S. trade embargo on Cuba by the incoming Obama administration. "We are hopeful that the new Administration of Obama will take a different view of Latin America and will take measures that diminish tension and will end the blockade (sic), which is a disgraceful policy." According to newspaper La Nacion, CFK brushed aside reporter Mariano Obarrio's question over how the GOA would deal with the case of dissident Cuban doctor Hilda Molina, whose request for a passport from her government to visit family in Argentina has been a bilateral issue for several years. Obarrio quoted GOA sources drawing the U.S. embargo into the Molina case, suggesting that Raul Castro needed a signal from the U.S. on the trade embargo before he would have the political strength to address brother Fidel's harder line on Molina.

17. (U) La Nacion contacted Dr. Molina in Cuba and printed a short interview with the dissident in which she asked that CFK, "with her history of defending human rights, not forget my case." Asked whether she thought the GOC refusal was related to a fear that she would speak out against the regime while abroad, Molina said that "the political, critical Hilda Molina, who will continue criticizing the Government of Cuba, lives in Cuba. I wish to go to Argentina as a mother and grandmother."

WAYNE